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ABSTRACT

In order to answer the question as to what can be done with video that cannot be done with sound-only recordings, the role of the visual channel of communication in interaction is examined. This examination is based on the experience of foreign language teachers who have been using video in the classroom for five years. The point is made that in face-to-face interaction there are a large number of non-verbal components that are part of the message and so have to be seen as well as heard. A set of categories specific to the visual component of meaning is proposed: (1) the deictic function, that is, pointing to objects present in the communicative situation; (2) the interactional function, ways of realizing the address system of the language; (3) the modal function, taken here as covering all the ways speakers indicate their commitment to what they are saying; (4) the indexical function, ways of providing information about the actor himself; (5) the linguistic function, or conventional gestures; and (6) the situational function, that is, the scene for a specific communication event. The pedagogical implications of each function are indicated. (AMH)

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MELANGES PEDAGOGIQUES 1979

P. RILEY

VIEWING COMPREHENSION
« L'ŒIL ECOUTE »

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
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RESUME

Le problème central abordé dans cet article est celui de l'utilisation de la vidéo pour l'entraînement à la compréhension orale : quelles possibilités nouvelles la vidéo offre-t-elle au pédagogue, ou, quelles sont les dimensions de la compréhension orale que la vidéo, par sa spécificité, permet d'aborder ?

La vidéo permettant de présenter les phénomènes communicatifs véhiculés par le canal visuel, l'article est, logiquement, orienté vers la description, exemples à l'appui, des principales fonctions des éléments non-verbaux visuels dans la communication : fonctions discursive, interactive, modalisatrice, indicielle, linguistique et sélectionnelle.

Cette description, outre qu'elle démontre l'importance des phénomènes non-verbaux visuels dans la communication, et par conséquent la nécessité de les intégrer au « programme » d'apprentissage, débouche sur un certain nombre de suggestions pratiques concernant l'utilisation de documents vidéoscopés pour l'enseignement/apprentissage de la compréhension des échanges communicatifs directs.

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This paper was first given at a seminar on " Listening Comprehension " organised jointly by the British Council and the Goethe Institut in Paris 1st-4th October 1979. We are grateful to the organisers for their permission to publish the article here.

INTRODUCTION

The basic question considered in this article is a very simple one — at least as far as the formulation is concerned. It is this : how can we use video equipment for the teaching of comprehension ? For practical reasons — here we are referring to things as crude as the relative cost of the equipment — this question is taken as meaning " What is specific to video ? " or " What can we do with video that we can't do with sound-only recordings ? " in other words, " Is video worth it ? "

Any serious attempt to answer these questions will involve an examination of the role of the visual channel of communication in interaction and so the first part of this article is devoted to a relatively theoretical consideration of that problem. However, it should not be thought that this is merely an exercise in armchair linguistics : the discussion is based on the experience of a number of teachers who have been using video in the classroom for the past five years, as well as on the observation of learners using the video section of the sound library (Riley et Zoppis, 1976) ; to start with, that work was based on an act of faith : " watching T.V. is good for your English ". This article is an attempt to describe why this might be so, by providing the teacher/learner using video with an analytic grid which should help him make better use of an extremely rich medium.

I - Aspects of communication in face to face interaction

A long time ago, in the days when face-to-face interaction was something adolescents did on park benches in the Spring, applied linguists worked on the comforting, ennobling, assumption that their job was to apply Linguistics. No one knew quite *how* you applied it, that was what all the research, argument and experimentation was about, but the actual aim was clear enough : Applied Linguistics was Linguistics applied. That is, a linguistic description of a given language had to be transferred to the learners : once they had all the necessary bits and pieces — the phonemes, morphemes and syntagmemes — they would know the language. One is reminded of Virginia Wolfe's Mrs Dalloway, looking for someone who " would just slip Greek into her head ".

Whether we talk in Virginia Wolfe's terms of " slipping in it " or in Noam Chomsky's terms of " systematic ambiguity ", the belief that linguistic descriptions have psychological reality, that they are what goes on in people's heads and that they therefore form a summary of what has to be taught, being at once the aim and the syllabus, this belief is still around. On the one hand, it allows purely theoretical linguists to pontificate about how languages should be taught (though Chomsky himself has been very careful to state that he doubts if his work has any practical application). And on the other it provides applied linguists and language teachers with a rationale for their work which is both scientific and accessible.

There is however, a major objection to this approach : it doesn't work.

Partly, of course, this is because when one starts " applying Linguistics " one does so in real life, with real people who have real problems, on particular days in actual classrooms, in certain groups — so that a whole range of extraneous, non linguistic factors, going from the weather to company policy, will determine what a particular individual will or will not learn, and how and when. Of all the variables in the language learning situation, only a few are " linguistic ".

But there is a second reason and it is one which is related not so much to the applications as to the linguistics, to the descriptions themselves. The whole of the movement towards a functional or communicative approach which we have been witnessing for the past seven years or so, is a reaction against the inadequacy of purely linguistic descriptions. The nature of that inadequacy is by now so well discussed that I feel I need do no more than summarise it by saying that " grammar is not enough ", that formal rules for the construction of sentences do not provide the ability to *use* the language which learners need to communicate. We have learnt the way that we can develop a model or description of great sophistication, going from phonetic and phonological contrasts, through morphological and lexical and syntactic forms and structures, we can go in great detail from the base of the pyramid to the top, and if we are lucky our learners will acquire that detail : yet they are still unable to produce or interpret utterances in context.

It is generally agreed that this is because the learner does not know the rules of use, the discourse rules of the language and/or because he does not possess the necessary situational or pragmalinguistic information. This is by no means a new observation — how many seminars have there been on topics like " Teaching communicative competence " during the last few years ? However, for the moment let us concentrate on an observation which is just as obvious — and a good deal older, by some thousands of years. It is this :

just as it is possible to possess all the rules in the pyramid, from perfect phonetic variation to doubly-embedded clauses, and still be incapable of using them, so it is also possible to possess none of them and still be able to communicate and understand. If I am travelling by train across Poland, say, and someone leans over and offers me a cigarette and I accept it and smile my thanks, then communication has taken place.

These are not, by the way, rare cases, even if they are extreme ones : we have all met people who are linguistically perfectly competent, but who, in a particular situation, are unable to communicate, just as we have all met people who can't speak a word of the language but who, in a particular situation, manage to communicate adequately. And what is important for us as teachers, of course, is that there is an infinite number of combinations along the cline which joins these two extremes.

The point being made here, then, is that in face-to-face interaction there are a large number of non-verbal, extra-linguistic sources of information and meaning. And they are not to be despised ; true, they lack the semantic or referential precision of the verbal component, but in pragmatic and relational terms they are generally far more important. We will return to the nature of their contribution to the meaning of messages later ; for the moment, let us just emphasise the point that such factors as proxemics, kinesics and deictics are all part of the message. They are not just a sort of gloss on the verbal component.

We need to get out of our heads completely what we might call the " audio-visual course " notion of the role of non-verbal features. There, the gestures, pictures, etc. are used as a gloss, as a parallel code to reiterate and explain the message being transmitted orally (Holec, 1975) ; a customer ordering fish in a restaurant has a little bubble containing a picture of a fish coming out of his head. This semiotic relationship — parallel coding of the same message — is totally different from the integrated and cumulative role played by non-verbal features in face-to-face interaction, where they converge to contribute to a final meaning or message of which they are an intrisic part.

Clearly, the conceptual and descriptive problems involved in this global approach to interaction in what we might call " non-autonomous linguistics " are immense, since human communication is a multi-channel phenomenon : we can communicate along any of the sensory channels by patterning any available substance which is capable of conventional coding and short term manipulation. Weird and wonderful examples abound of course, going from smoke, sign and whistle languages, through Braille and perfumed notepaper, to prisoners tapping on pipes.

But of course, two of the sensory channels are especially privileged from this point of view, by which I mean that, given the physical nature of man and of the world he lives in, they are able to carry greater loads of information, in more varied ways and they have more rapid fading. These are the visual and acoustic channels.

Relatively speaking, the acoustic channel is by far the better studied, although until the advent of modern phonetics it was the patterning carried by the channel — words and sentences — which was studied, rather than realisations. It is highly instructive to look at those aspects of oral messages which are absent from the written form : tone, tonicity, key, voice qualities, tempo and rhythm, for example. These vocal non-verbal features, which are highly systemic, highly linguistic, realise meanings which are discoursal, relational, interactional and pragmatic, but only very rarely semantic.

All this is even more true of the various visual components of meaning. And our ignorance of how they operate, or even what they are, is far greater. It is no coincidence that the gap between the invention of apparatus for recording sound and that for recording vision is about the same as the gap which separates phonetics and phonology from.. from what ? Optetics and Optemics ? But the ability to record the data, however vital, is only the first step ; what we also need is a series of categories which will help us describe the contribution of various visual messages to the overall meaning which is created in face-to-face interaction. What, that is, are the communicative functions of visual, non-verbal features ?

II - The communicative functions of the visually perceived aspects of interaction

How does what we see relate to what we hear during an interaction and how is this information integrated into meaning ? To the best of our knowledge, very little work has been done on the ways in which messages perceived visually are articulated with messages transmitted along other channels : if we turn to the field of semiotics, for example, we find studies which are of great interest to the theoretical linguist, but which are far too abstract and generalised for more detailed descriptive purposes (although the integrative approach to the nature of meaning being followed here clearly owes much to modern semiotic theory). If we turn to those linguists whose interests include the non-semantic functions of language — Jakobson and Halliday come most readily to mind — we find little or no discussion of non-verbal realisations. Most disappointing of all is the work being carried out under the banner of " Pragmatics " or " Speech Act Theory " which, on examination, proves to be concerned with the semantic cover of artificial sentences in isolation, being

completely devoid of any social or interactional dimension. Indeed, we would argue that the refusal by speech act theorists and generative semanticists to consider non-verbal communication vitiates their work, since it obliges them to attribute to the verbal element communicative functions which are largely carried non-verbally in interaction.

More rewarding by far is the work of the ethnolinguists such as Sacks, Labor and Hymes, whose approach is ably represented in France by the group working with Bourdieu at Paris XIII (Bachman, 1979). Some valuable insights are also to be found in a recent article by Eddie Roulet (1979). Even so, none of these investigations have tried to put forward a repertoire of categories specifically for the visual component of meaning.

What follows, then, is a first tentative step in that direction. It is both eclectic and based on the findings of a C.R.A.P.E.L. research team working on the analysis of face-to-face interaction[1]. We will try to indicate some of the most important pedagogical implications of the analysis which is outlined here, but since the area is such a vast one it will not be possible to enter into any great detail. This does not preclude practical, albeit tentative, suggestions. For the sake of clarity of exposition, the pedagogical aspects are discussed as each function is presented, but this is obviously an artificial procedure, since in reality it is often impossible to isolate and identify functions and their realisations in this way : a particular behaviour can realise several functions e.g. a gesture of " surrender " in an argument (" O.K., have it your own way ! ") may realise indexical, modal and interactional functions simultaneously.

1) The Deictic Function

The importance of deictic reference for the verbal component is already widely recognised and studied, and the term is here used in the generally accepted sense of " pointing at " objects which are physically present in the communicative situation. We refer to them without naming them, as when we use pronouns, for example : " he ", " this thingummy ", " the man over there ", " you " only have an effective referential value when used in a situation. But what has seldom been discussed is the way in which the reference of such elements is specified or disambiguated : in face-to-face interaction this is almost always done visually. The actual realisation may vary, of course, from a gesture (" Look at this " holding out the object in question) to gaze (" you " is very often the person I am making eye-contact with) to the simple acknowledged presence of the referent within the sight of the participants. An excellent way

[1] Other articles produced by this group and relevant to the present topic are listed separately in the bibliography.

of appreciating the importance of this function in the construction of meaning is to take a sound-only recording of some goal-directed activity (*not* a discussion or debate) : without some source of information as to who the participants were, what the activity was and where it took place, such recording can be almost totally incomprehensible :

A Give me a couple more (noises) of
B I can't...
A Try the next one... behind
B These ?
A The bigger ones. Put them down with the others.

We are not saying that this type of meaning (or any of the other types we will be discussing) cannot be transmitted some other way, of course : radio plays and telephone calls would be impossible if this were the case. But this is how most deictic reference is communicated in face-to-face interaction. Indeed, the extent to which deictic reference is shifted to the acoustic channel gives us the basis for a very interesting typology of discourse. The " sound effects " of BBC radio dramas are not just limited to background noises — the crunch of boots on the gravel in the drive, the merry whistle, the chime of the front-door bell, " Ah, that will be the postman ! " ; in the nature of things, the verbal component here carries a higher load, the message becomes more " explicit " — but only in purely verbal terms.

There is a very important implication for language teaching here, since almost all constructed didactic materials belong to this second, verbally explicit type of discourse and therefore do little to prepare the learner for the highly allusive deictic discourse usual in face-to-face interaction. This can only be done by exposing the learner to discourse which shows rather than tells : recordings of such T.V. programmes as do-it-yourself lessons, or group activities for children can be highly suitable, as well as almost any recording of people participating in a goal-directed physical activity such as cooking or burglary. By asking questions such as " What has x just seen ? " " What is y indicating ? " " Where does z want it put " " What person or object is he referring to ? " " Where exactly is " here " or " higher " or their non-verbal equivalents ? " — the teacher can help direct the learner's attention to aspects of the interaction which would otherwise escape him far more often than one might imagine. There is no doubt about the fact that realisations of deictic reference vary from culture to culture ; was it not Sapir who reported on an Indian who " pointed " with his lips ? There are also very strong grounds for believing that different cultures actually select different aspects of the situation for deictic reference. Together, these form a cogent argument for the explicit teaching/learning of this aspect of comprehension.

2) The Interactional Function

One of the most important characteristics of discourse in face-to-face interaction is its *reciprocity* : it is the collaborative construct of two or more participants whose contributions or *turns* combine to form interactive structure in terms of who speaks when and to whom. This structure and these behaviours are almost exclusively regulated by visually perceived non-verbal communication — gaze, above all, but also posture, orientation and gestures. These features realise the *address* system of the language, which we have shown to be of fundamental importance to discourse (see in particular, Gremmo, Holec and Riley, 1978).

Address, then, is a discourse term which refers to the imposition of rights and duties (e.g. to take the floor or to reply) on participants in an interaction. Here, too, it is *possible* for address to be realised verbally (e.g. by nomination : " How about you John ? ") ; again though, the extent to which this occurs will influence the discourse type. A clear example is the telephone call, where all the non-verbal attention signals (nods, gaze, facial expression, etc.) have to be replaced by verbal signals (" yes ", " Uh-huh ", etc.).

Now for many linguists and teachers this point is so obvious as to be trivial and it is interesting to consider why this should be so. One of the basic concepts of linguistics (*the* basic concept according to some observers) is the *interchangeability* of Speaker and Hearer. From Saussure to Chomsky this parallelism has been axiomatic. The " Ideal Speaker-Hearer " is a simplification without which modern linguistics simply would not exist : but it is a simplification that is made at a price, since it leaves no room for variation, personal or social. Comprehension is just expression in reverse. As long as we stick to mere coding and decoding this approach is insightful. But as soon as we start to look at interaction we realise that it is painfully inadequate : it is simply not true that all participants have equal rights to the floor in all interactions — children do not have the same rights as their parents, backbenchers do not have the same rights as ministers, employees do not have the same rights as employers. Understanding these rights and the dynamic discourse roles which manifest them, that is, understanding who is communicating with whom is comprehension in the most profound sense.

In the foreign language classroom, where the teacher is a native speaker of target language, a number of seemingly disparate difficulties related to such matters as participation, comprehension and attitude, appear to be due to a cross-cultural failure to identify and understand address behaviours by both teachers and learners. We are only just beginning to appreciate the size of this problem : at a recent workshop in Lyons, examples were drawn from a very

wide range of situations — French for North-Africans, Turks and South-Americans, English for Vietnamese, Finnish and French learners, Russian and German for French learners.

The manifestations of these differences vary enormously, as is only to be expected : we are dealing here with the most fundamental aspect of interaction, the way in which contributions from different sources are fused into a single discourse. For example, there are cultures where it is impolite to meet the gaze of a teacher, or where it is regarded as extremely presumptuous to answer to a superior's question, or where general address (i.e. the teacher throws open the floor to all the students present) is always interpreted as a rhetorical question. It is also extremely common to find address behaviours which have opposite meanings in different cultures ; for example, an attention signal can be taken as a bid for the floor. For the moment, of course, most of this evidence is anecdotal but it is now quite clear that any description of the language of the classroom must take address behaviours into account : it is pointless to expect, nay, a better linguistic performance from Ali when Ali has trouble even recognising when a question has been asked or when he is expected to speak.

Obviously, much of this holds true outside the classroom, usually with more serious results. A Frenchman participating in an international meeting or group discussion will sometimes give the impression that he is over-categorical, aggressive and continually interrupting, largely due to his turn-taking and turn-keeping procedures : for example, the French signals for " I'm just finishing " are invariably interpreted by British participants as a blunt " Keep quiet and don't interrupt ! ", fertile ground for misunderstanding and friction which, for a businessman or a trade unionist wishing to negociate agreements with his British opposite number, could well prove disastrous.

Sound-only recordings usually misrepresent address behaviours simply because they are limited to nomination or purely verbal address : one finds, for example, people who are supposedly in sight of one another consistently using proper names, a relatively rare occurrence (in British English, at least : there seem to be considerable differences in the standard American system of address).

For teaching comprehension, TV recordings of group discussions can be very useful, although professionally produced materials can be too " polished ", the cameraman and producer using their own intuitive knowledge of address behaviours to switch the picture from person to person in synchrony with their speaking turns, thereby often neatly editing out the very behaviours we would like our learners to see.

Teachers who doubt that their learners have any problems of this kind sometimes receive a nasty shock when they find that they are quite unable to answer questions such as : " Is A interrupting B here, or was it his turn to

speak ? " Other useful questions for focusing the learners' attention include : " Who is A speaking to ? " " When does he show that he is ready to hand over the floor ? " " How does he show that he wants B to have the next turn ? " " How do C and D show that they do or do not also want to say something ? " " Who can speak next ? " " How does B know that it is his turn to speak next ? " " Does A expect a reply ? ".

3) The Modal Function

Modalisation is notoriously difficult to define and we do not propose to try to do so now, although we believe that many of the difficulties involved are pseudo-problems resulting from the failure to recognise the importance and role of non-verbal behaviour. For the moment, it is taken as covering all the different ways which are available to an actor to signal the extent to which he is committed to the literal meaning, the propositional content, of his utterance : is he serious, joking, enthusiastic and so on. Since it is largely through modalisation that actors try to regulate their psycho-social and affective relationships, this is obviously a crucial factor in face-to-face meaning. An " understanding " smile a " dismissive " gesture or an " aggressive " posture are all important contributions to the final meaning created in a communicative act, so important that they can actually override the surface, linguistic meaning, as is the case with irony or sarcasm, for example.

Like the other functions listed here, modalisation has already been recognised as far as the verbal component is concerned though attention has been concentrated on the semantics of the modal verbs, but see Roulet (1979) and Roussel (1974). However, as we have alreday said, the realisations of these functions are not exclusive to one channel or another ; modalisation often occurs simultaneously at the vocal non-verbal level (facial expression above all, in Western society, but also gesture and posture) as well as at the verbal level.

The enormous complexity of this phenomenon at the theoretical and descriptive levels should not, however, deter the language teacher or learner from trying to tackle the problem. By asking questions such as " Is A teasing B ? " " Is A being sarcastic (ironic, formal, aggressive hypothetical, etc...) ? ", the teacher goes directly to the heart of the matter : there is little point in waiting until we have, say, an integrated theory of the meaning of facial expression before asking ourselves why A smiles at a given moment. Again, it may be objected that to do so is trivial and unnecessary, since the learners will understand naturally. Such an argument can be refuted on a number of points : first, it is based on an unacceptably naive view of the nature of language and communicative behaviour ; secondly, the balance needs to be redressed — condi-

tioned by their previous experience, learners tend to concentrate on the verbal component at the expense of all other aspects of communication ; and thirdly, experience shows that in fact learners do often make wrong judgements on the key of an act or interaction. This last point has long been familiar to teachers of literature who groan inwardly as a frothy, amusing short story is taken literally and understood as a sombre sociological statement of fact ; such misjudgements seem to be at least as common in interaction, even between people from related cultures.

4) The Indexical Function

If modalisation, then, is generally *other-related*, if it refers to the ways in which an actor tries to influence others, then it is to be distinguished from the indexical function, which is *actor-related*, i.e. which provides information about the actor's self (Laver and Hutcheson, 1972).

Anatomy, size, skin, muscle and hair type and condition, cosmetics and grooming, clothing, status symbols, adaptors and tools, facial expression, gesture, posture, breathing and blinking rates — these are only some of the visual signals which can transmit indexical information. This information includes such socially vital markers as nationality, sex, age, state of health, class, profession and emotional state ; it tells us, that is, about the identity of an actor and about the probable nature of his participation and role in a given interaction. These matters are so important that often the " business " of an interaction does not begin until participants have had a chance to size one another up ; " phatic communion " or " small talk " plays a fundamental role on social intercourse by providing a vehicle for the exchange of indexical information.

Much of what has been said about modalisation also holds good for the indexical function. Indeed, in practise, it is often difficult to distinguish between them ; when we say that someone is " enthusiastic ", for example, we are usually referring both to his attitude towards his interlocutor and to his own emotional state. But descriptive problems of this kind need not bother us in the classroom ; in fact, indexical information can be tackled with complete beginners — " Is A angry (sad, nervous, amused, etc...) ? ", " What sort of a job do you think A does ? ", " What is A's attitude to B ? ", " What is the relationship between A and B — have they just met, (are they relatives, married, friends, etc.) ? ", " Why do you think A is dressed like that ? ", " Is A a conservative type or is he rather trendy ? ".

Such an approach can prove a healthy antidote to the " phlegmatic Englishman, inscrutable Chinese " sort of stereotype by providing the learner with the categories necessary for more refined judgements : how many English

students of French, for example, really understand what it means when a Frenchman of a certain age wears a beret ? Or when he has a small rosette in his buttonhole ? And how many French students of English really understand the social implications of a bowler hat or certain kind of tie ? And if this seems to belong to the realms of folklore, then consider the absolutely basic fact that the French and English misread each other's behaviour so much that they are often incapable of telling whether the other is angry : the Englishman thinks the Frenchman is angry when he is not and the Frenchman thinks the Englishman is not angry when in fact he is absolutely furious.

3) The Linguistic Function

For many people linguistic non-verbal communication is a contradiction in terms, and it has to be conceded that it is not a particularly happy phrase. Yet it can be shown that some non-verbal behaviours at least can be highly conventional, systemic and semantically precise. It is convenient to distinguish four categories of these behaviours, generically known as gestures, on the basis of their communicative function. (This is discussed at greater length in Riley, 1975) :

(a) Emblems : these normally function as verbal surrogates and include gestures such as " Thumbs up " or " V-sign " (Scheflen, 1973).

(b) Illustrators : gestures which are related to the propositional content of the message (" It was this sort of shape... ").

(c) Enactions : gestures related to the illocutionary force of the communicative act (Beckoning to command " Come here ", for example).

(d) Batons : those behaviours which are related to the prosodic characteristics of the message such as rhythm and tempo. (This does not imply that they are subsidiary to the vocal or verbal realisations).

Until recently, almost all work on non-verbal communication was in fact restricted to the first three sub-categories listed above, gestures which are conventional, replicable, conscious and easily expressed in words. A number of gesture-repertoires have been collected for different cultures which have confirmed the conventional nature of gestures : they have to be learnt and the " same " gesture varies in meaning from culture to culture. The use of these lists is limited but real and it seems only reasonable to use video to teach them for comprehension purposes. This is a relatively straightforward task, rather like teaching a few new items of vocabulary, but one which always fascinates learners since it is often their first introduction to a further dimension of communication.

At a more sophisticated level, it has been shown that video-recordings of native speakers can be an excellent means of sensitizing students to problems of stress, rhythm, tempo and intonation, since these prosodies are often synchronised with batons (cf. Heddesheimer and Roussel, 1978).

8) The situational Function

" Situation " could, of course, be regarded as a macro-category subsuming everything which has been discussed so far. It is used here in the sense of the spatio-temporal setting perceived as a scene for a specific type of communicative event i.e. in so far as it impinges on or is relevant to communicative behaviour. The identification of the significant features here will probably have to be left to anthropological semiotics (cf. Mary Douglas's *Natural Symbols)* with off-shoots such as architecture and proxemics (Hall, 1966) and more recent (cf all chronemics, which studies the significant use and perception of time (Bruneau, 1979).

Much interesting work is being done here, but the area is a vast one : the problems, though, are detailed and concrete, not just airy-fairy academic abstractions. It can be amazingly difficult for, say, a new arrival in New York, to see a telephone kiosk or letter-box or underground station -- he just doesn't know what to look for. Banks, churches and examination halls are all places where an Englishman's behaviour becomes formal, reverential and hushed : but when one looks at, say, banks in the Middle East, churches in Italy or examination halls in France, it soon becomes obvious that this is not an immutable law of nature, merely a cultural choice.

This is not to say that language teachers should be experts in semiotics or anthropology but, by definition, they are involved with cross-cultural communication and should therefore, be aware that perception of setting and situation varies from culture to culture. A shop in the middle east is a setting for situations involving negociation and bargaining : this is not the case in most European cultures, so that North Africans in France, for example, either risk annoying the shopkeepers by trying to beat them down or accept the price as displayed and go away feeling sure they have been cheated. When Italian tennis fans recently took their " rowdy " behaviour to Wimbledon — they cheered, shouted encouragement, stamped and so on — it was regarded by the English as absolutely shocking, a mixture of cheating and bad manners : even a game of tennis is not the same situation in two different cultures.

This awareness of social norms is not easy to acquire, since it implies close familiarity with the foreign country in question, but the observation and discussion of authentic video material does seem to be a valuable preparation for the countless situations, going from pubs and cricket matches to family reunions and business meetings in which a learner may one day find himself.

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